



THE LAST DAY OF TERM

A Play

H. M. PAULL

Samuel
French

UTHOR

PAULL, H. M.

CLASS

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ITLE

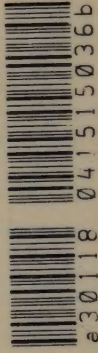
The last day of term.

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THE LAST DAY OF TERM

A Play for Eight Girls in One Act

BY
H. M. PAULL

SAMUEL



FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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98201615

ISBN 0 573 05219 0

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
LATIMER TREND & CO. LTD, PLYMOUTH
MADE IN ENGLAND

THE LAST DAY OF TERM

THE LAST DAY OF TERM

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Character costumes and wigs necessary for plays published by
Messrs. SAMUEL FRENCH LTD may be obtained from Messrs.
CHAS H. FOX LTD, 25 Shelton Street, London, W.C.2.

CHARACTERS

Sybil Ware (Captain of the School)

The Hon. Arabella Harley

Beatrice Worthington

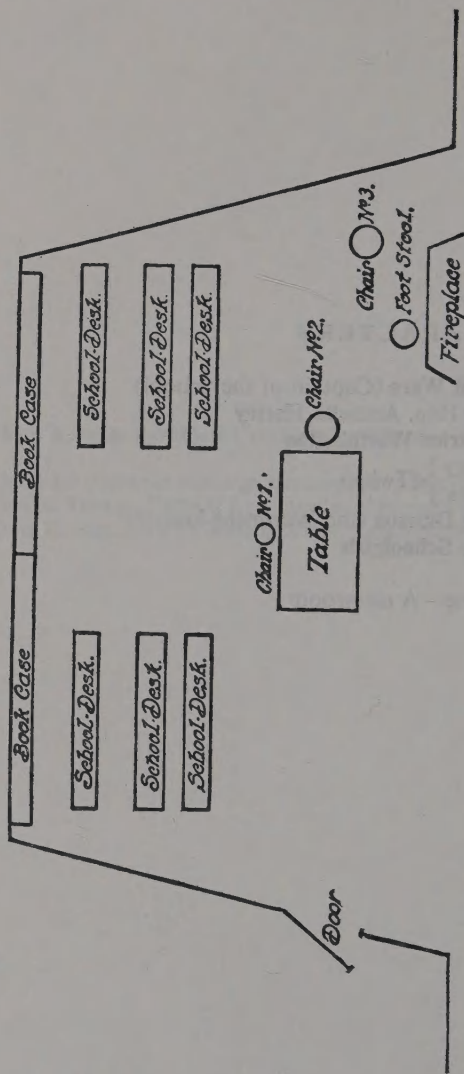
Peggy } (Twins)

Helen }

Mrs Dawson (the Wardrobe-keeper)

Two Schoolgirls

Scene – A classroom



THE LAST DAY OF TERM

SCENE

A classroom. The fender is in front of what is supposed to be the fire. A red light can glow from the footlights, and from time to time the characters warm their hands

It is afternoon

Mrs Dawson, a charming lady of forty, her hair slightly grey, unobtrusively dressed, is seated in chair No. 2, her work-box on the table. She has some needlework on her lap, but is reading a letter and a cutting from a newspaper. She wipes her eyes. Voices outside in dispute; she hastily puts the letter, etc., into her bag and begins sewing. A stamped and addressed letter is on the table

Enter Peggy and Helen noisily; two excitable, voluble, good-natured girls of fourteen. Peggy wears spectacles. Helen is in ordinary dress; Peggy wears the dress of a fairy, but her hair is still in a pigtail, and she has one pink silk stocking on and one black cotton one. She carries a silk stocking in her hand

Peggy (*coming to the right side of the table*) Oh, please, Mrs Dawson——

Mrs Dawson Good gracious, Peggy! What a sight you are!

Helen moves across the room behind the table

Peggy Yes, aren't I? I'm so glad I've found you; I was just trying on my dress for tonight—I'm a fairy, you know—and my stocking has started an awful Jacob's ladder; will you run up it?—I mean, run it up for me? Do, there's a dear.

Helen (*between chairs Nos. 2 and 3*) And a button's come off my white glove.

Mrs Dawson Then sew it on again, you lazy girl.

Helen But I've lost the button.

Mrs Dawson Then find one in my work-box.

Helen goes behind Mrs Dawson to the work-box and searches

(To Peggy) Give me your stocking and I'll see what I can do.

Peggy *(giving it to her)* Oh, thanks ever so much. Are you coming to the performance tonight? *(She sits on the table)*

Mrs Dawson I dare say I shall be at the back somewhere.

Helen *(having found a button and coming to the foot-stool, where she sits and sews on the button)* Of course you must come.

Peggy Helen and I are going to be fairies.

Helen Yes, and Peggy says she's going to keep her "specs" on!

Peggy If I don't, how can I see where I'm going? I shall be bargaining into everybody.

Helen Whoever heard of a fairy in specs?

Peggy I have, so there. Cinderella's fairy godmother in the pantomime wears them. Shows how much you know.

Helen I know more than you; I've got a prize this term and you haven't.

Mrs Dawson Come, come, that's enough; sisters should never quarrel.

Helen I never do; it's always Peggy. I say, Mrs Dawson, is it true you're not coming back next term?

Mrs Dawson Quite true; I shall say good-bye to all of you tomorrow.

Peggy Well, I'm awfully sorry, really; you've been a brick to me and got me out of no end of rows when I've torn my things.

Helen Everybody nice is going: Jessie and Minnie and Sybil——

Peggy Of course Sybil's going, silly! How can a girl who's a Bachelor of Science stay at school?

Helen It does sound funny for a girl to be a bachelor, doesn't it?

(To Mrs Dawson) Do you know where she is going?

Mrs Dawson I've heard she has an appointment as science mistress at a college.

Peggy I'm so glad, because I don't think she's well off, though she's so clever.

Helen She is jolly, though she is Captain. And so kind-hearted, too. *(To Peggy)* Do you remember how she spanked you for pulling the cat's tail?

Mrs Dawson Serve you right.

Peggy No, it didn't; it scratched me.

Helen 'Cos you pulled its tail.

Peggy I say, Mrs Dawson, do you think we might ask her to write her name in our birthday books?

Mrs Dawson I dare say she would—how can I tell?

Helen And will you too?

Mrs Dawson Yes, if you wish.

Enter Sybil Ware, a good-looking, self-reliant, well-built girl of eighteen. She carries some books. Peggy jumps off the table

Sybil (*seeing Peggy, laughing*) You little imp! I never saw anything so comic. Let's have a look at you. (*Turns her round*) You are a new kind of fairy.

Peggy Oh, please, Sybil, don't! I'm only half-dressed, and my hair isn't done or anything.

Helen (*coming across in front of the table*) Oh, please, Sybil, I want to speak to you.

Peggy So do I—both of us.

Sybil Well, here I am; what is it?

Peggy First of all, will you write your name in my birthday book?

Helen Mine, too.

Sybil Yes, if you wish. Where are they?

Helen
and
Peggy } I'll fetch it.

Peggy and Helen run across Sybil and go out of the room. Sybil shuts the door, and then goes to chair No. 1 and sits. She places the books she has been carrying on the table

Sybil What's the matter, Mother dear? You've been crying.

Mrs Dawson Only a little, dearest, and not because I'm unhappy. I've some news for you. Send away those children as soon as you can.

Enter Peggy and Helen with books

Peggy Here you are, Sybil. When's your birthday?

Sybil The nineteenth of June.

Peggy Let's see what your motto is. (*Reads*) "Kind hearts are more than coronets." Oh, how stupid!

Sybil (*writes*) There!

Helen has gone behind the table and Sybil has given her book to Mrs Dawson

Mrs Dawson You want me to write too?

Helen Of course.

Mrs Dawson writes

Peggy (*standing at Sybil's side*) Put "with love", do!

Sybil Very well. What's *your* birthday?

Peggy The fifteenth of May.

Helen Mine's the fifteenth of May too. 'Tis a nuisance that twins have the same birthday. It ought to be arranged differently.

Sybil Here's your motto, Peggy. (*Reads*) "Divinely tall, and most divinely fair." Tennyson didn't make a good shot that time, Peggy.

Peggy Oh yes, he did. You wait till I'm grown up.

Mrs Dawson and Sybil have exchanged books

Sybil Let's see Helen's quotation.

Helen (*coming on the left side of Sybil*) Oh don't, please, Sybil. I'm so sick of it.

Peggy (*mockingly*) "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever."

Sybil Excellent advice for both of you. (*Writes*)

Helen Put B.Sc. after your name, won't you? It looks so well.

Peggy How does it feel to be a Bachelor of Science?

Sybil Not very terrible. (*Giving book*) There you are, and you must write in mine by and by.

Helen May we? That's jolly kind of you.

Mrs Dawson Here's your stocking, Peggy. Now run away, both of you.

Peggy But we want to tell Sybil something.

Helen Awfully important.

Peggy It's on our consciences.

Sybil Then let it rest there for a bit: come back in a quarter of an hour. I'm busy now.

Helen Very well; don't forget. It's very important.

Peggy Come along, "sweet maid".

She runs off, chased by Helen. Exit Peggy and Helen, leaving the door ajar

Sybil (*still sitting in chair No. 1*) What is it, Mother? Have you had bad news?

Mrs Dawson (*still sitting in chair No. 2*) No, dear; good news I suppose I must call it. (*Shows cutting from paper*) Look!

Sybil What! Your husband dead?

Mrs Dawson Yes, at last. My sister sent me the cutting.

Sybil It's a week old.

Mrs Dawson Yes; my sister only saw it by accident.

Sybil So now you needn't be afraid any more that he will find you out.

Mrs Dawson No; it's a great relief. It's a pity I can't be sorry, but I can't. He was a bad husband to me.

Sybil I can't pretend I'm sorry. I scarcely knew him. And it isn't as if he were my father.

Mrs Dawson No, your father was the best of men.

Sybil Was this man so very bad?

Mrs Dawson Yes; he deceived me every way he could; spent all my money, and then left me without a penny, and you on my hands. Luckily I managed to find work, and so was able to keep you at school; and then how happy I was when the chance came for me to come here as wardrobe mistress, to be in the same house as my dear girl!

Sybil rises, moves behind her mother and sits on the foot-stool, warming her hands

Sybil I hate to think that it is you who have been paying for me all this time, and that no-one knows how splendid a mother I've got.

Mrs Dawson No, no, dear; it would never do for them to know that the wardrobe mistress was the mother of the Captain of the school. I hope no-one suspects.

Sybil I don't care if they do. I should like to tell everybody.

Mrs Dawson No, you mustn't. You promised me, remember.

Sybil Yes, I did; and I often wish I hadn't.

Mrs Dawson Well, it doesn't matter now; we shall both be far away in a day or two.

Sybil (*gazing into the fire*) Yes, and now I shall be able to give you a little home and see you whenever I like without all this horrible secrecy. Oh, I am glad that at last I can pay back a little of what I owe you.

Beatrice peeps in at the door unseen

Mrs Dawson Nonsense; it's been my only comfort to be able to help you. (*She kisses Sybil's head*)

Exit Beatrice

And you've worked so hard and got on so splendidly. Who would have thought that at your age you would have a post at a big College like Trentham! I'm proud of you.

Sybil (*turning to her mother*) Not so proud as I am of you, Mother.

Mrs Dawson Oh, by the by, I've written to Trentham to engage those lodgings. (*Points to letter*)

Sybil That's right; but I shan't be satisfied till you have a little cottage of your own.

Mrs Dawson Plenty of time for that. (*Hears steps*) Hush!

Sybil stands up, moves to the front of the table, picks up the books she has placed there, walks up the room between the desks and puts books in bookcase

Enter Arabella and Beatrice. Arabella is a tall, handsome girl of sixteen; supercilious and conceited. Beatrice, a dark girl of sixteen, Arabella's chum and toady

Arabella (*coming to the right side of the table*) Really, Mrs Dawson, this is too bad. Look at my chiffon blouse; they've actually half torn the collar off in the wash.

Mrs Dawson Have they? I'm sorry.

Arabella It's disgraceful. I shall complain about it. What's the use of your being here if you don't look after our things properly?

Sybil (*coming down the room to behind chair No. 1*) Bella! I'm ashamed of you. Is that the way to talk to Mrs Dawson?

Arabella What business is it of yours?

Beatrice (*on the right side of the room*) Oh, I dare say Sybil has very good reasons for always taking Mrs Dawson's part.

Mrs Dawson (*rising*) Don't say any more, please. Give me the blouse. I'll see what can be done about it.

Mrs Dawson collects her things, gives Sybil an imploring glance, crosses in front of the table and the other girls and goes out

Sybil (*after she has gone, and coming down to the left side of the table*) Bella, I think that you and Beatrice are the most unlady-like girls in the school.

Arabella (*furious, on the right side of the table*) What do you mean?

Sybil (*going*) Exactly what I say.

She crosses the room in front of the table. There is silence while she does so. She then goes out

Arabella (*coming in front of the table to the fire*) The impertinent cat! I hate that girl! Just because she's Captain she thinks she can say anything to me.

Beatrice Never mind; you can pay her out.

Arabella I should like to! A girl nobody knows who, who comes from nobody knows where; who makes friends with a sort of servant like Mrs Dawson.

Beatrice (*coming in front of the fire to chair No. 2*) More than a friend I believe.

Arabella (*eagerly*) What do you mean?

Beatrice (*sitting in chair No. 2*) You remember you met them out walking together the other day?

Arabella (*standing, one foot on the footstool*) Yes, and they separated when they saw me.

Beatrice Exactly, and just now when I peeped in they were kissing.

Arabella No!

Beatrice Fact.

Arabella Disgusting.

She sees the letter on the table

Hallo! (*She comes behind chair No. 2 to behind the table*)

Beatrice What is it?

Arabella Isn't that Mrs Dawson's writing?

Beatrice Yes. Addressed to Trentham? Why that's where Sybil's going.

Arabella Then Mrs Dawson's going to the same place!

Beatrice Then that settles it!

Arabella You mean they're relations?

Beatrice More than that. I believe Mrs Dawson's her mother.

Arabella But Sybil's name is Ware.

Beatrice What's that matter? I believe Mrs Dawson came here to be near Sybil, and changed her name so that no-one might know.

Arabella I believe you're right. It's always seemed queer that Sybil has made such a mystery about her people.

Beatrice There's another thing, too: you remember Gladys said that she saw them together at Dymchurch one holiday. She was almost certain it was they.

Arabella (*still standing behind the table*) Of course; I'd forgotten. Oh, now I shall be able to make her squirm. (*Moving towards the right side of the room*) What a pity we didn't know earlier in the term!

Enter Peggy and Helen with a bookmark. Peggy is now in ordinary costume

Arabella Now, you kids, what do you want in here?

Peggy We've got an appointment.

Helen A business appointment.

Peggy With the Captain.

Beatrice has risen from chair No. 2, and moved in front of the table to the group R

Beatrice What's that silly thing you've got?

Peggy It's a bookmark.

Helen For a present.

Arabella A bookmark! Why, they went out of fashion before you were born.

Beatrice And who's going to be the happy possessor of this work of art?

Helen Sybil, if you want to know.

Arabella Humph! It's good enough for her, I suppose. I wouldn't own such a trumpery thing.

Peggy You won't, you needn't be afraid. Nobody would give you a keepsake if you were leaving.

Helen (*dodging in front of the table and running to the left side of it so that the table is between her and the others*) And I wish you were.

Arabella I'll box your ears in a minute, you little nuisance.

Helen You've got to catch me first. (*She makes a face at Arabella*)

Arabella And I will too! Beatrice, you go round that side and I'll go this.

They advance with outstretched arms; just as they reach Helen she escapes under the table, then runs up the middle of the room and gets on the top of the desks

Peggy (*with a ruler*) Don't you bully my sister, or I'll hit you on the head with this.

Beatrice Come, Bella, don't bother about these impertinent kids.

Arabella As if I'd take any notice of such vulgar little wretches! (*Going*)

Peggy "Au revoir", your Royal Highness.

Helen Give my love to the Queen next time you're staying at Windsor Castle.

Exit Arabella and Beatrice

Peggy Ugh! I hate that Bella! She thinks she's everybody just because her father is a lord.

Helen (*coming down to the front of the room again*) Never mind; she little thinks what a bombshell we've got up our sleeves.

Enter Sybil

Sybil Ah! Here you are. Now what is this important matter on your consciences?

Peggy Please, Sybil, first will you mind our giving you this as a keepsake?

Helen From both of us; I made half.

Peggy But I thought of it first.

Sybil Why, of course, I should love to have it, and I'll keep it in my best book. Thank you very much. (*Kisses them*) But was that your secret?

Peggy No, 'twas something else.

Helen Which we thought you ought to know.

Sybil Well, what is it? (*She crosses to chair No. 2 and sits*)

Peggy We don't want to be sneaks, you see——

Helen But 'tisn't sneaking so long as we don't tell a mistress, is it?

Sybil (*out of patience*) Oh, one at a time, please. You, Peggy.

Peggy (*important—in front of the table*) Don't interrupt, Helen.

It's about the History Exam. You see, I was sitting in front of Bella, and you know how rotten she is in history?

Helen (*on the right side of the table*) What's that got to do with it?

Peggy There you go, interrupting already.

Sybil Come, come!

Peggy Well, you know I wear specs——

Helen (*impatiently*) Of course she knows, silly.

Peggy Shut up! Well, do you know that sometimes if the light's right you see what's behind you reflected in your specs?

Sybil I dare say.

Peggy 'Tis so, and I saw Bella take out a slip of paper and copy from it, and then Miss Tucker came round, and she pushed it between the desk and the wall. She's next to the wall, you know.

Sybil But you couldn't see what was on the paper.

Peggy No, of course not.

Helen 'Twas a crib!

Sybil How do you know?

Helen Why, Peggy wrote me a note and gave it me as we came out——

Peggy And I went up to Bella and talked to her——

Helen And I slipped back and got the paper!

Peggy Yes, and I watched Bella, and she soon went back and tried to find her crib, and you should have seen her face when she couldn't find it!

Sybil What did you do with it?

Helen I've got it here. Look, all the dates of the Tudor period.

Peggy And all Henry the Eighth's wives in proper order; I always get them mixed, and I expect he did too.

Sybil I think you'd better let me have this paper.

Peggy Yes, please, Sybil. We didn't know what to do about it.

Helen 'Tisn't fair, is it, for her to crib at Exam?

Sybil Why didn't you tell me before? The Exam was three days ago.

Helen The list only came out today. If she'd been near the bottom we thought we'd say nothing, but she's second.

Peggy And if there's a second prize——

Sybil No, there's only one for her form. But you were quite right to tell me.

Peggy Shall you report her?

Sybil I don't know yet.

Helen You won't let her know we found it out, will you?

Sybil Of course not, don't be afraid.

Peggy Hush! She's coming.

Enter Arabella and Beatrice

Arabella (to Peggy and Helen) Now, you two children, run away and play; I want to speak to Sybil.

Sybil (coming to the centre of the stage) Yes, run away, dears. I want to speak to Bella, too.

Peggy Very well, Sybil.

Exit Helen and Peggy

Sybil goes to and shuts the door. Then she comes back to the right side of the table. The other two have moved to the front of the fire

Sybil Now, Bella, what have you to say to me?

Arabella Don't call me "Bella", please; my name's Miss Harley.

Sybil (with a mock bow) Well, Miss Harley, what is it?

Arabella I want to tell you that I and Beatrice——

Sybil (in front of the table) Miss Worthington, you mean.

Arabella —have made a discovery which I've suspected some time. Is it true that the wardrobe-mistress, Mrs Dawson, is your mother?

Sybil (sitting on the front of the table) I thought you said you'd made a discovery; if so, why ask me?

Beatrice That's quibbling; is it true?

Sybil I don't know why I should trouble to answer you, but I will if you like. It is perfectly true. What then?

Arabella What then? Why, it's a scandal; I shall tell all the girls and complain to my people; it's a shame that we should have to associate with a girl whose mother mends our clothes. No wonder you're ashamed of her.

Sybil What makes you think I am?

Arabella (*sitting in chair No. 3*) Well, you've been precious careful to keep the fact a secret.

Beatrice The prospectus says this is a school for the daughters of gentlemen, not work-people. And you're the Captain! A pretty Captain!

Arabella I shall tell the Head.

Sybil What shall you tell her?

Arabella That your mother has come here under a false name and got her place by a swindle.

Beatrice (*moving to the back of chair No. 3*) Your name is Ware, and hers is Dawson.

Sybil (*coming to the left side of the table and facing the others*) Yes, that's correct, but haven't you sense enough to know that if my mother married again after my father's death she would change her name, but that I shouldn't?

They look sold

Now, have you told anyone yet about your precious discovery?

Arabella Not yet.

Sybil Then hold your tongue till I tell you you may speak.

Arabella I shall do no such thing.

Sybil I think you will. You remember I said I wanted to speak to you. Have you seen the lists of the Exam results?

Arabella (*surprised*) Yes.

Sybil You came out second in the History paper of your form.

Arabella What of it? I've no time to—

Sybil Yes, you have. No-one expected you to come out so high, did they?

Arabella How do I know?

Sybil You didn't—cheat, I suppose?

Arabella (*rising suddenly*) Cheat? (*Confused*) How dare you? Of course not.

Sybil (*produces paper*) Then this doesn't belong to you, though it's in your writing.

Arabella comes to Sybil quickly

No! Don't snatch; it can't be yours if you didn't cheat.

Arabella (*bowled out*) Very well, it *is* mine, but what of it? Can't I make a list of dates if I want to?

Beatrice moves down to the left side of Arabella

Sybil Certainly, but you mustn't use it during an Exam, and then hide it between the desk and the wall.

Arabella (*sullenly*) I suppose some of your toadies have been sneaking to you. I don't see there's anything to make a fuss about.

Sybil No, I suppose you wouldn't. To cheat might seem dishonourable to an ordinary girl, but to the Honourable Miss Harley—

Arabella Are you going to sneak to the Head about it?

Sybil I don't know yet. If you'd won the prize I should have no choice, but you see even by cheating you couldn't get to the top.

Beatrice Then it's only spite if you sneak about it.

Arabella (*turning round and speaking in an undertone to Beatrice*) Shut up, do! You'll only make her turn nasty.

Enter Mrs Dawson with blouse. She comes to the right side of the table

Mrs Dawson (*to Arabella*) I've had your blouse seen to, Miss Harley; I think it's all right now.

Sybil moves up to the back of the table

Arabella (*ungraciously*) Thank you.

Sybil Mother, dear—

Mrs Dawson starts

Oh, it's all right; Miss Harley knows. She's sorry that she was rude to you just now. (*To Arabella*) Aren't you?

Sybil holds up the crib

Arabella (*sullenly*) Yes.

Sybil I want a word with my mother. If you'll come back in a few minutes I'll let you know what I've decided about—you know what.

Arabella (*after a pause—undecided whether to obey or not*) Come along, Beatrice.

Arabella and Beatrice cross in front of the table and go out of the room

Mrs Dawson (*moving to chair No. 1*) Oh, why did you call me mother before that girl of all others?

Sybil Because she found it out. But don't be afraid; she'll hold her tongue. But what's happened? You look quite upset.

Mrs Dawson I am, rather. (*Wipes her eyes*)

Sybil Any bad news?

Mrs Dawson No, no, quite the contrary. Oh, my dear girl! You'll never guess what I have to tell you.

Sybil Then tell me, quick.

Mrs Dawson I've had a letter from some lawyers—about my poor husband; my sister has sent it on. Look!

Sybil What a long one. What does it say?

Mrs Dawson It seems he's been making money lately—some company he's in—and he died without making a will, so most of it comes to me.

Sybil No! I *am* glad! How much is it?

Mrs Dawson They think it will be about eight thousand pounds.

Sybil Eight thousand pounds? Why, it's a small fortune! Oh, Mother! Now you'll never have to worry about money any more.

Mrs Dawson (*sitting in chair No. 1, almost crying*) I can hardly believe it!

Sybil (*standing beside her mother*) But you must. Oh, if it had only come earlier! But better late than never.

Mrs Dawson But, Sybil, how came it that those girls found out I was your mother?

Sybil I'll tell you all about it by and by. Where are they? I want every one to know. (*Goes to door*)

Sybil (*calling*) Miss Harley! Beatrice! Peggy! (*Comes back*)

Mrs Dawson But we're leaving tomorrow. Can't we—

Sybil No, Mother dear, we can't. You must let me have my way.

Enter Peggy and Helen, then Arabella and Beatrice

Come in, all of you. I've got some news for you. Is anybody else about? (*Goes to door*) Come in, Clara.

Enter Clara and another girl, or more

Now listen to me, all of you.

She goes to the right side of Mrs Dawson, and stands by her with her arm round her

This is my dear mother; when my father died she—she lost all her money, so instead of taking me away from this school she worked for me that I might not lose my education. Then she took the situation here so as to be near me, but she would not come till I had promised not to let anyone know she was my mother, for fear that if it were known she might not be able to stay here.

Peggy Oh, I wish we'd known!

Helen So do I.

Sybil So do I, too. However, you know now, and I'm proud to be able at last to let you know the best mother in the world.

(*Kisses her*)

Peggy Of the best girl in the world.

Helen What a pity you're both going away!

Peggy And you're going to live together?

Mrs Dawson Yes; I'm glad to say that we've had a stroke of good fortune, and I shall be very comfortably off in future, with a nice little home of my own.

Peggy Oh, I am glad!

Helen Hooray!

Bell rings

Sybil There's the bell for calling over, so now you must run away. Oh, by the by, Miss Harley, I have something that belongs to you.

Peggy Why do you call her Miss Harley?

Sybil (*smiling*) By her special request. (*To Arabella*) You don't want it back, I suppose?

Arabella is silent

Then I'll tear it up. Now, Mother dear, we'll go and see the Head and tell her all about it.

As they go, with Peggy and Helen skipping about them—

the CURTAIN falls

H. M. PAULL

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ISBN 0 573 05219 0

